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SUBJECT: PARTIES WALK OUT ON INEC CONFERENCE

1. Nigeria,s Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) scheduled a "consultative" meeting with 28 of Nigeria,s currently registered 30 political parties on March 2 to discuss the national Local Government Area (LGA) elections coming March 27. Opposition parties reacted to INEC's excluding of two parties, the Alliance for Democracy (AD) and Progressive Action Congress (PAC), by walking out. In his opening remarks, Guobadia said the two parties were not invited because of disputes between factions as to who leads them. Each party has two factions claiming to be its legal leader.

2. Alhaji Balarabe Musa, National Chairman of the People,s Redemption Party (PRP) and Chairman of the opposition umbrella Consultative Convention of Nigerian Parties (CCNP), challenged INEC's exclusion of the two parties as "faulty and illegal." He was the first to comment on the concerns of the other parties, stating that the law was clear in allowing the parties to attend. His characterization of the exclusion as "a threat to the other parties" was echoed by many of the other parties' leaders. In the ensuing debate about the exclusion, 22 parties walked out of the meeting and one of the two representatives of the largest opposition All Nigerian People,s Party (ANPP) joined them.

3. The other ANPP representative, former Minister of the Federal Capital Territory Jeremiah Useni, remained in the meeting. The other parties that remained are the ruling People,s Democratic Party (PDP), the New Democrats (ND), the National Mass Movement of Nigeria (NMMN) and the Africa Renaissance Party (ARP). PDP and ANPP will field candidates for most of the LGA seats across the country. The parties that walked out are somewhat smaller, and the NMMN, ND and ARP that stayed are smaller yet.

ROBERTS